

Labyrinth Prayer by Ruth Valdez, BSFP Graduate 2017



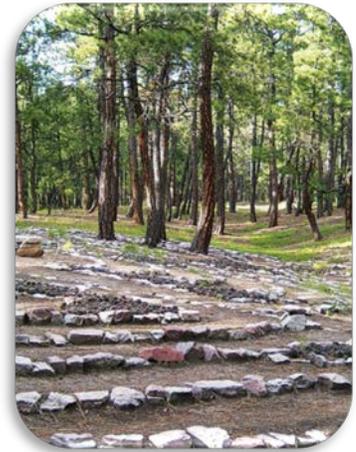
I'm feeling the need to tell a story with no place to tell it. Then, I thought of the Sisters at Benet Hill and with a heart full of thanksgiving I share my labyrinth experience.

I first learned of praying the labyrinth towards the end of BSFP in year one. The symbolism of the labyrinth really spoke to me. There are no dead ends in a labyrinth, only the continuous journey towards the center of God. There are times when I feel so close to the divine center that I could almost hear the angelic choir and other times I felt as far from the center as one can get. But, I continue the journey.

The trees were purposefully left in place when the labyrinth was created at Benet Hill-reminding us that sometimes obstacles show up on our journey. If I am so focused on the obstacle in my way, I won't see how the journey continues around it. Whenever I walked the labyrinth and came to a tree, I would name whatever burden I was carrying at the moment - fear, doubt, anger, my children's names (ha,ha!). Then, I would come to another tree and lay another burden down. It really helped me to reflect and name some shadow areas of my life.

My transformation began when I walked the labyrinth during the Lazarus retreat. I began my prayer walk in the usual way. As I approached the first tree, I touched it and named 'fear', but it just didn't feel right. I came to the second tree and, again, I touched it and said 'doubt'. There was no release. I came to the third tree and just looked at it - I was blank. I began to think, *"What is wrong with me? Am I out of touch with myself?"* I continued to walk. As I began to pass by the trees the only words that would come to me were words like: grace, mercy, loving kindness, and strength. I continued that day touching the trees and asking God to anoint me in his mercy, grace, wisdom, and joy. For the next couple of labyrinth walks the trees continued to remind me of the attributes of God.

This past weekend I began my labyrinth walk with a bit of anxiety in my heart. I was in one of those *"God, do you even know I am here?"* moods. In my heart I was begging God for a sign - any sign (truth be told, I'm pretty sure it was more like whining.) *"God, where are you?"* I came to my first tree and held on to it with both hands and rested my forehead on it. It felt like 'life' to me. The strength of it surprised me. I would go so far as to say that the trees were pulsating with life, that is how strong it felt. I moved on again (whining - oops, I meant praying) for God to reveal himself to me - and HE DID! He said, *"Ruth, these trees are not obstacles on your journey, they are ME on your journey. I want you to know that I am always on this path with you. I am in the middle of your path."* It was then that I realized why the trees felt like life to me. God was using them to demonstrate his life-giving presence to me on my path (needless to say, I became a tree-hugger that day!) *"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."* Deut. 31:8



The community of Benet Hill is a reflection of God's love, openness to all, and I have learned so much. I had no idea two years ago just how big a threshold I had crossed when I walked through the doors and began the Benedictine journey.